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Muria

GHOTUL MEMBERSHIP AND RULES

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The Muria belief in equality is illustrated by a characteristic story. 'Raja Dokara ruled in Tulsidongri. It was thick jungle: there was no Brahmin to cook his food. So he went to Bhagavan to ask for one. Bhagavan said, "Certainly take one if you can recognize him. They all look alike to me". Bhagavan told everyone to wear a dhoti, and when they came, Brahmin and Ganda, Muria and Dhakar, Halba and Maria, the Raja found it impossible to tell which was which. So he sent Idur Kola Pen to see what he could do, but he also failed. At last a fly came and said, "Give me something to eat, and I'll get you a Brahmin". Idur Kola Pen offered it gold and silver and many tax-free villages. "No", said the fly, "I don't want these. There's a sore on your leg. Let me sit and feed there." Idur Kola Pen allowed it, and when it had fed, the fly settled on a Brahmin's head. Thus the man was recognized and he became Raja Dokara's cook.'

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This conception of complete democracy affects the position of the leaders. Their power is not absolute; they can be, and sometimes are, removed from office. They can be punished by a meeting of the other members. At Palari, the three leaders—Diwan, Tahsildar and Jamadar—abused their position, and the boys and girls met and fined them. In any case, the rule of the ghotul is not that of a dictator, but of a council. Associated with the chief boy or girl is a company of two or three who advise them on all important matters.

These leaders do, of course, have their privileges. The little boys fag for them and massage them if the girls are absent. Little girls do the Belosa's hair and run her errands. In ghotul where partners have to be constantly changed, the leaders are sometimes allowed to have girls of their own. In Banjora, for example, the Kotwar, who is there the leader, and the Belosa always sleep together, though the others must change every two or three days.

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Are members of other tribes and the Hindu castes admitted to the ghotul? This is the sort of question that is usually met with an indignant denial from the Muria elders, who explain that they never admit outsiders for fear of possible matrimonial complications, and equally indignant denials from Hindus and others who claim that the ghotul is a degraded institution to which they would never send their children. Neither is true.

Throughout the Muria area may be found examples—not many examples, but some—of Muria-Lohar, Rawat, Nahar and even the despised Ganda and Ghasia being admitted as members of the dormitory. Such children receive titles; they are allotted duties and allowed all ghotul privileges. In Palli Barkot the people said that Muria-Lohar boys and girls were given the fullest privileges but that there was a ban on Mahara, Rawat and Kuruk. The Lohar children could sleep with the Muria children, but must not marry them. In Nayanar I discovered to my astonishment that two of the girls who were taking the leading part at a Muria wedding were Lohar—the Alosa and Dulosa of the ghotul. In Markabera, the most popular girl in the entire company, the Saile who had a Muria ghotul-partner, was a Lohar. The Belosa of the Mule ghotul was a Lohar, so was the Salya; in 1941 the Jamadar of Kokori, the Jamadar of Phunder, the Jalaru (a girl) of Phunder, the Jhoria of Modenga were all Lohar.

The leading drummer of Hatipakna was a Nahar and two of his brothers and a sister were also prominent members of the ghotul. At Junganar a Ganda boy was made the Suel, and a Ghasia was the Kotwar at Modenga. In Phunder there was a Kalar boy. Rawat are commonly admitted.